

## Evolution of Marist College housing

Original plans for Marist College called for commuting students only except for the Marist Brothers who were completing their training to teach in Marist Schools. When Richard Foy became President, Brothers John Malachy Hoffman and Daniel Kirk showed him the results of a survey they had conducted in all Catholic grammar schools and secondary schools within a fifty mile radius; these predicted that there was not enough of a pool of potential students to reach even the planned cohort of 600 commuting lay students.

Foy authorized seeking a limited number of non-commuting students. By Fall 1959 ten such students had enrolled at Marist College. They were initially housed at the Kings Court Hotel on Cannon Street in the city of Poughkeepsie. The arrangements were unsatisfactory for both the hotel and the students. By January 1960 the students moved on campus to a bungalow which previously had been used for housing novices in training for the Marist Brothers. This bungalow was behind the original Novitiate building on the Bech property (near where the road to the McCann Athletic Center merges into the parking lot). The resident students were fed by the student brothers' kitchen in a separate room in the original Fontaine Building located behind the present chapel.

The Donnelly building was then under construction and would have space for uses other than classrooms for several years. Two floors at the southern end were set aside for dormitory rooms, with four students to a room. A cafeteria was installed in the lower floor.

Meanwhile, the College applied for HHFA loans to build a separate permanent building. Architect Donald Lane drew up plans for a building to house 120 students. Three were planned, but only the first was funded by the HHFA. The three

were planned for what is now the McCann Baseball Field. When the site proved unsuitable for foundation work, the dormitory named Sheahan Dormitory was shifted to a rock cliff over the railroad with excellent views of the Hudson. This building was the first approved by the HHFA for construction with sheet rock walls instead of the cinder block walls normally used for dormitories constructed after the second World War. The college had to solicit bids for both cinder block and sheet rock; when the latter came in lower, the HHFA approved the change.

In other ways the dormitory was in the style common throughout the US at the time. The boring effect of the long corridor was alleviated somewhat by Mrs. Evelyn Fisher, then the design consultant for the College, who painted the rooms different colors. When the doors were left open, this created a rainbow effect in the main corridors.

As the Sheahan dormitory was constructed for well under the planned budget, the HHFA approved the College plans for a larger dormitory for 300 students, housed on six floors of 50 students each. The style of the Leo Dormitory still continued the pattern of post World War 2 construction, with the exception of sheet rock walls instead of cinder block.

The long range plan for Marist had changed from a total of 600 students to 1500 students: 100 Student Brothers, 900 residential students, and 500 commuting students. This led to a design of a larger dormitory building. About this time, a group of faculty and administrators visited Michigan State University, which had gained a reputation for innovative student housing. The research at Michigan State indicated that a college student rarely made close acquaintance with more than two dozen students during four years at college. The design of champagnat Dormitory reflected this, as it logically can be thought of as separate dormitories stacked over each other. The students were planned two to a room, but in smaller groupings of 24 students separated by a common room. Two

floors were joined to a two story common room, so groupings might be constructed of 24, 48 or 96 students. The College applied for financing through the New York State Dormitory Authority because the HHFA would approve only living and dining spaces; Marist wanted to include classroom space and a theater. The initial Champagnat complex was opened by Summer 1966. It freed up the space in Donnelly Hall for academic uses.

These dormitory arrangements remained in force during the 1960s and 1970s. One exception was the addition of the Gregory and Benoit houses on the (then) north campus, each housing 32 students. Originally designed for use by the student brothers, they soon were converted into regular housing and were occupied by groups which presented various themes for living together.

In the mid 1970s, I visited Stonehill College in Massachusetts en route to a summer vacation at Cape Cod. This college, operated by the same order which operates Notre Dame University at South Bend, was founded about the same time as Marist, but was better funded by its founders. It developed some common dormitories, but soon switched to apartment style housing. This supported a progressive system of housing: entering students would begin in the older style dormitories, make friends there, and then assemble into smaller groups to apply for the smaller apartment housing constructed in phase two.

This progressive style fits nicely with the changing backgrounds of incoming students. In earlier years, students often lived two or three to a room at home, and the transition to two-in-a-room was easy. Nowadays most incoming students live in their own rooms; transitioning to two-in-a-room is problematical for some, as it requires adjustment to needs, customs and styles of others. Small group living in later years

at college reinforces patterns of congenial groups of moderate size.

With the growth of the college to 4000+ students, all future housing on the north campus and east campus is apartment style. The most recent housing complex consists of rooms for singles.

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